

Complex Ground Water Problems Vex Officials

By VINCENT THOMAS
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 It's quite a reversal of expected form, but it can be a considerable relief to learn from a qualified source that a tough legislative problem may not have to be brought up at our next session. This is especially true when an interim committee, after months of pa-

tient and intensive study, comes to the conclusion that legislation may not be the proper answer to the problem. After the enactment a few years back of the implementing law for the statewide water program, and voter approval of the needed bond issue, it was evident that some water problems still warranted care-

ful review. The Assembly Interim Committee on water embarked on a comprehensive study of the economic, engineering, geographical, legal and political factors of "ground water basin" management. AT PRESENT, there is complicated legal machinery for the determination and alloca-

tion of rights to water from surface streams. However, there is no similar system for fixing rights to pumping water from underground water storage basins, except in a few limited areas. Anyone outside such areas who is willing to spend the money for pumps is free to draw what he wants. A short cycle of dry years

drained some of the important southern and coastal basins nearly dry, and created a real problem. As a result at its early hearings last year, the committee received suggestions from a number of sources, including state agencies, that some sort of state legislation to license and control use of under-

ground water should be passed. However, a preliminary report on the committee's conclusions states that the group "has found no clear need for major statewide legislation on ground water at this time."

ment of ground water basins is desirable, and enables workable solutions to management problems. A number of possible lines of action are available to local areas to help in devising management programs which will be acceptable and financially possible. The basic importance of ground water to our California economy cannot be overestimated, the committee finds, because nearly half the water used in the state each year comes from underground reservoirs. The legislature recog-

nized this important fact in 1961, by passing a law setting forth a clear state policy as to the need of protecting and preserving underground water resources. THE COMMITTEE pays tribute to the well developed programs of several local water conservation districts, and says that continuation of such programs will help solve existing critical problems, and provide experience for the future.

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